

# Implementing green practices in DERMACON: A call for action by IADVL

**Sunil Dogra<sup>1</sup>, Hitaishi Mehta, Manjunath Shenoy<sup>1</sup>**

Department of Dermatology, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, India, <sup>1</sup>Department of Dermatology, Yenepoya Medical College, Mangalore, India

Climate change impacts human health, ecosystems and natural resources leading to global warming, extreme weather events, forced displacement, mental health pressures, air pollution, food and water insecurity, vector-borne diseases and biodiversity loss. Year 2022 was the sixth warmest year (all after 2010) on record based on NOAA's (The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) temperature data since 1880.<sup>1</sup> To mitigate climate change impacts, greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced and sustainable practices promoted, including energy conservation, renewable energy sources, eco-friendly transportation and agriculture and food systems.

The healthcare industry is responsible for approximately 4.4% of global net greenhouse gas emissions, making it the second largest emitter after the food sector.<sup>2</sup> Emissions arise from energy use in healthcare facilities, patient and healthcare worker transportation, medical events and the production and disposal of medical equipment and biomedical waste.

The Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists (IADVL), second largest professional organisation of dermatologists, represents dermatologists and skin care professionals in India. 'DERMACON', IADVL's annual conference gathers healthcare professionals, researchers and industry leaders to share knowledge and promote best practices in dermatology. However, like many large events, DERMACON has a significant environmental impact, generating waste, consuming energy and emitting greenhouse gases. As a responsible healthcare professional organisation, IADVL can lead in promoting sustainable practices and reducing DERMACON's environmental

impact which can be then implemented in smaller national/state conferences.

By implementing green practices, IADVL can reduce the carbon footprint of DERMACON, save costs and promote sustainability among the delegates. One way to achieve this would be going paperless. Meaningful steps have already been taken in this direction with online registration, digital handouts, e-posters and promotion of digital communication and scientific programmes via a dedicated conference app. To enhance sustainability, we can use digital signage on large screens or projectors for schedules, announcements and directions instead of printed banners and posters. This reduces paper waste and resources used for printing, providing an interactive platform for attendees. Unnecessary conference mementoes, printed certificates and single-use decorations can be completely avoided. Instead of using disposable name badges, digital or reusable ones can be utilized. Banners, advertisements for seat covers and the serving of water and beverages should be done using recyclable or compostable materials. E-certificates for faculty and delegates can be given instead of printed material. An option may be given to delegates regarding the choice of conference bags which can be made from eco-friendly materials. Delegates not opting for bags may be offered discounted registration fees. In the conference halls, heating/cooling systems may be set to function only during occupancy hours.

Choice of venue should preferably take into account the implementation of green practices by them, such as the use of energy-efficient lighting, renewable energy sources such as solar panels, water conservation measures like rainwater

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**Corresponding author:** Dr. Sunil Dogra, Department of Dermatology, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, India. [sundogra@hotmail.com](mailto:sundogra@hotmail.com)

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harvesting and green design featuring ample natural light and ventilation. Several venues in India offer green event options at present. To ensure that specific sustainability standards are met, green certifications like LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and IGBC (Indian Green Building Council) can be sought.<sup>3</sup> By seeking out venues that have achieved these certifications, organizers can ensure that they are choosing a sustainable and environmentally responsible option.

Promotion of sustainable transportation is another important measure that warrants consideration. The venue chosen should be centrally located and easily accessible by public transportation. Delegates should be encouraged to use public transportation and carpool. To promote eco-friendly transportation, the conference registration barcode can be utilised as a multifunctional pass for the entire event, mirroring the practices seen in numerous international conferences. Furthermore, complimentary shuttle bus services can be provided, operating at regular intervals between the conference venue and various hotels. Providing secure bike parking can encourage biking, reducing individual car trips and carbon emissions. A hybrid event can reduce the carbon footprint by limiting travel emissions and virtual attendee participation. Reducing the number of scientific and business meeting halls will have a positive impact on green DERMACON. The exhibition area and pharma industry stalls should also be promoted to all green-conference norms while performing their activities for obtaining stall footprints.

Additional measures that can be employed include sustainable catering and waste reduction. Caterers who use sustainable food practices such as locally sourced, organic and vegetarian or vegan options should be given preference. Getting delegates to pre-order their food during registration and avoiding individually wrapped food items are additional ways of reducing food-related waste. Reduced registration fees may be offered to delegates not opting for major meals (lunch/dinner). Issue of single-use plastic water bottles may be addressed by providing water-refilling stations, reusable/recyclable cups, or branded water bottles for future use. Recycling and composting bins should be provided throughout the venue. Finally, carbon offsetting programmes should be considered to mitigate the carbon emissions generated by the conference.<sup>4</sup> This works by calculating emissions, and then investing in projects reducing an equivalent amount elsewhere. Examples include renewable energy (wind, solar, hydropower), forest conservation, reforestation and methane capture from landfills or livestock.

The medical community acknowledges the irony of conferences aimed at improving global health being responsible for global warming and as a result, many organisations have advocated for carbon-neutral conferences to be held.<sup>5</sup> The American Medical Association aims to

cut its carbon footprint by 50% by 2030 and the Royal College of Physicians in the UK aims for carbon neutrality by 2050. In 2018, the American Academy of Dermatology established an Expert Resource Group for climate change and healthcare. Mygreendoc.com offers a free online tool to calculate conference carbon footprints and suggests emission reduction actions. It's time for the IADVL to follow suit.

Numerous sustainable practices can be applied in daily outpatient departments and clinics to lower their environmental impact. For instance, creating surgery sets with essential items only, offering smaller bandages/dressing materials, encouraging pharmaceutical representatives to use digital displays instead of printed hand-outs in consulting chambers and providing telemedicine consultations where possible. Hospital staff should receive training in proper waste disposal.

In conclusion, as we face the escalating impacts of climate change, it has become increasingly important for all sectors to act towards sustainable and environmentally responsible practices and promote a healthier planet for all. It is time for the medical community to step up and take action towards sustainability and DERMACON and IADVL can serve as a model for other medical associations to follow in India.

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Patient's consent not required as there are no patients in this study.

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#### **Conflict of interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

#### **Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-Assisted Technology for manuscript preparation**

The authors confirm that there was no use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-Assisted Technology for assisting in the writing or editing of the manuscript and no images were manipulated using the AI.

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